



2006 Census: Everyone Counts - Cultural Diversity

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will be conducting the 15th national Census of Population and Housing on Tuesday 8 August.

The Census aims to take a 'snapshot' of Australia every five years - collecting vital information on the social, economic and housing characteristics of Australian society.

Our community is formed by a diverse range of culturally and linguistically diverse groups, which each need to be counted in the Census. The collection of data about these segments of the community is especially vital when forming policy, allocating resources and providing services. The Census collects information for approximately 280 countries of birth, 240 languages and 120 religions across Australia

Without the Census, determining the extent of Australia's cultural wealth becomes a guessing game. Questions on the Census form about ancestry, religion, birthplace and languages spoken are also used by a variety of organisations for allocating and targeting services to particular cultural groups such as language support services

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has developed a strategy to count culturally diverse groups for the 2006 Census. The Ethnic Enumeration Strategy is a framework of techniques aimed at gaining support for, and facilitating and encouraging participation in, the Census from the many community groups and nationalities that exist throughout Australia.

The aim of the strategy is to identify ethnic community groups, especially those communities likely to be missed or undercounted, and to encourage their participation by explaining the purpose and benefits of the Census.

With almost one in five of Australians speaking a language other than

English at home, there is a need to provide assistance to households that have difficulties in speaking or reading English. An important element of the overall ABS communication strategy for the Census is to ensure that non-English speaking communities are well informed. Specific activities include:

- the identification of ethnic enumeration officers within the Census Management Units around Australia
- a community information campaign involving the dissemination of information to community leaders, relevant government organisations and relevant pan-ethnic organisations
- translated information - in the form of pamphlets posters and web based information
- a paid media advertising campaign to get information directly to community members including advertisements in ethnic media and radio.

The Census also employs Collectors with skills in languages other than English, and operates a Language Helpline through the Census Inquiry Service.

The Language Helpline caters for 20 of the most commonly used languages in Australia. If the caller is not conversant in any of the 20 languages offered by the Census Inquiry Service, a customer service representative will connect them to an external interpreting service and set up a 3-way conference between the Census Inquiry Service, the caller, and the interpreter provided by the external service.

In addition, Census Management Units throughout Australia consult with Migrant Resource Centres. Presentations about the Census are given to principals, teachers and students of Adult Migrant Education Service centres.

These consultations are part of an ongoing effort to gain and maintain trust in the Census amongst ethnic communities. The ABS understands that the past experiences of many migrants to Australia mean that trust is an important issue.

A big part of gaining that trust is in making sure everyone knows that Census information is kept strictly confidential. People from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, like all Australians, can be confident that their information will remain confidential.

Individuals' information is protected by law. After Census forms are processed, all names, addresses and other information that might identify

individuals is removed from Census records. All past or present ABS officers (including Census Collectors) are legally bound to secrecy under the [Census and Statistics Act \(1905\)](#) never to release personal information to any person or organisation outside the ABS. Organisations like the Federal Police, Centrelink, Immigration, ASIO, the Tax Office and private marketing companies can never obtain personal information from the Census.

Return to 2006 [Census Fact Sheets / Articles of interest](#)